

United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Implementation of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Agreement for Oklahoma

July 2006

Introduction:

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) has prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA), the *Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Implementation of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Agreement for Oklahoma*, to evaluate the environmental consequences associated with implementing Oklahoma's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement.

The purpose of the Oklahoma CREP agreement is to reduce nutrient and sediment loading in two high priority watersheds by restoring riparian buffers and reducing livestock access to floodplains. Eligible farm land would be voluntarily removed from production and planted in grass, shrubs, and trees. CREP is needed to meet the following goals in Oklahoma:

- Improve overall water quality in the two targeted watersheds
- Reduce phosphorus loading by 30 percent, nitrogen loading by 32 percent, and sediment loading by 30 percent
- Reduce excess nutrients in waterways caused by runoff from poultry litter
- Establish riparian buffers to help reduce overland flow of phosphorus to streams, stabilize stream banks, and decrease bank erosion
- Restrict livestock access to floodplains to decrease overland flow of pathogens to streams, and to decrease stream bank erosion and the subsequent sediment loading of streams
- Demonstrate both short-term and long-term benefits of riparian protection so that producers and other landowners are encouraged to utilize riparian protection as a standard part of land management.

Preferred Alternative:

The preferred alternative, which is also the proposed action, would implement the Oklahoma CREP agreement by enrolling up to 19,035 acres of riparian areas within the Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller and Spavinaw Lake watersheds into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Filter strips and riparian buffers would be installed on eligible land to reduce nutrient and sediment input and improve overall

water quality in the watersheds. Participants would receive annual rental and maintenance payments for the 15-year contract periods, as well as one-time signing incentive payments.

Reasons for Finding of No Significant Impact:

In consideration of the analysis documented in the PEA and the reasons outlined in this FONSI, the preferred alternative would not constitute a major State or Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The determination is based on the following:

1. Both beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the preferred alternative have been fully considered within the PEA. The beneficial impacts outweigh any adverse impacts. Adverse cumulative impacts are expected to be minor as implementation of the preferred alternative will cause very little if any adverse impact on the area of potential effect and the human environment.
2. The preferred alternative would not significantly affect public health or safety. Implementing the preferred alternative would improve overall water quality in the targeted watersheds by reducing nutrient and sediment inputs.
3. The preferred alternative would not significantly affect any unique characteristics which include historic and cultural resources, parklands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.
4. The preferred alternative does not involve effects to the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial.
5. The preferred alternative would not impose highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The preferred alternative would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The intended outcome of the preferred alternative is improved water quality. Any similar future action would need to be evaluated on an individual basis to determine potential environmental consequences.
7. The preferred alternative is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The Cumulative Effects chapter of the PEA discusses potential cumulative impacts of implementing the preferred alternative, which were determined to not be significant.
8. The preferred alternative would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Consultations with federally recognized tribes and the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office were completed.
9. The preferred alternative would not have adverse effects on threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat. In accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the effects of implementing the preferred alternative on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat were addressed in the PEA. Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service was completed at a programmatic level. Further consultation will occur as necessary for individual CREP contracts.
10. The preferred alternative does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination:

In accordance with the with the *National Environmental Policy Act* and its associated implementing and FSA compliance regulations (40 *Code of Federal Regulations* [CFR] 30 parts 1500 et seq., 7 CFR 7 parts 799 et seq.), I find that the preferred alternative is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, no environmental impact statement will be prepared.

APPROVED:


Signature

7/27/06
Date (MM-DD-YYYY)

JIM REESE
Name (Typed or Printed)

State Executive Director
Title

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